

***Orbis Romanus* and *Barbaricum*.**  
**The Barbarians around the**  
**Province of Dacia and**  
**Their Relations with**  
**the Roman Empire**

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# *Orbis Romanus and Barbaricum*

## The Barbarians around the Province of Dacia and Their Relations with the Roman Empire

*Edited by*  
**Vitalie Bârcă**

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# From absolutization to relativization: the hoard from Valea-Strâmbă (Hu: Tekerőpatak)-Kápolnaoldal revisited<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** In May 1939 one of the most important finds attributed to the Sântana de Mureș-Cerneahov culture was discovered in Valea-Strâmbă and since became a symbol for the last phase of the respective archaeological culture. The hoard is found on the western side of the 'Kápolnaoldal' hill at an inclination of 23 degrees, and an altitude of 857–875 m above sea level, therefore we consider that the place chosen for the hiding of the hoard does not indicate a location designated for human habitation, but rather a different set of reasons. The preservation of the hoard is only partial, considering that its exact composition is unknown the chronological framework of the individual pieces should not be extrapolated to the hoard itself which is thus unfit to sustain any kind of historical argument and hypothesis. Furthermore, we observed that the most important hoards from the 4–5<sup>th</sup> centuries, also including the treasure from Valea-Strâmbă, have a common feature. Taking into consideration the hoards with precise place of discovery it becomes evident that in virtually all cases the locations chosen for concealment are conspicuous from a topographic point of view, standing out of their environment. The seven cases mentioned in the article indicate that concerning the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> century hoards we are not simply dealing with a phenomenon of teaurization, but a cultural manifestation of the late antique power elites spread throughout a considerable geographical area.

**Keywords:** Valea-Strâmbă-Kápolnaoldal (Kápolnaoldal hill), hoard, brooch, buckles, rings, strap distributor, coins

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<sup>1</sup> The authors wish to thank Alpár Dobos for his useful insight on the present paper's draft.

## 1. The terminology of the Valea-Strâmbă find revisited: hoard or part of a hoard?

Nearly 80 years ago, in May 1939 one of the most important finds attributed to the Sântana de Mureș-Cerneahov (Hu: Marosszentanna-Csernyahov) culture, ethnically<sup>2</sup> linked to the Goths, was discovered in Valea-Strâmbă (Hu: Tekerőpatak) (presently: Harghita county, Romania). The find since became a symbol for the last phase of the respective archaeological culture.<sup>3</sup> Aside from Zoltán Székely's paper, which gives a detailed account of the hoard's context of discovery, none of the related publications managed to effectively address the discrepancies between the original composition of the hoard, and the finds which entered the museum's collection. Indeed, according to a careful reading of Székely's account only a fragment of the hoard was recovered by the institution – although as he writes – the finder claimed that all of the finds were handed over to the museum. A further important issue concerns the chronological discrepancies within the numismatic material of the hoard, some 40 coins dating to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, while the number of 4<sup>th</sup> century coins amounts to only 13,<sup>4</sup> indicating that from a numismatic perspective the hoard can be clearly divided in two separate parts. If indeed the list drawn up by Zoltán Székely is accurate, the original composition of the hoard is open to discussion, as the presence of the two groups of coins within the assemblage casts doubt on its unitary nature. These inconsistencies were overlooked by previous commentators who chose instead to take at face value the original interpretation, and thus to draw conclusions based on incomplete information. It is therefore important to underline the fact that the term 'hoard' hitherto used in the archaeological literature with regard to the present find should be replaced with the that of 'fragmentary hoard' which reflects the situation more accurately, as only a fragment of the original find made it into the museum's collection. This term also implies that the absolutization of the find's chronological implications, as done by all previous commentators, including one of the present authors (E. Gáll<sup>5</sup>) is no longer viable. With this in mind, every potential conclusion regarding the 'hoard fragment' should be viewed with caution.

## 2. The importance of the discovery place. Macro-geographical communal habits or mere contingency?

A further issue regarding the fragmentary hoard is linked to the circumstances of its discovery. According to Zoltán Székely's detailed account, the find was discovered in the stone quarry opened on the side of the *Kápolnaoldal* (Kápolna hill),<sup>6</sup> a volcanic cone situated south-east of today's village and belonging to a protrusion of the Eastern Carpathians towards the inside of the Giurgeu basin (Hu: Gyergyói medence). The highest point of the volcanic cone is 932 m above sea level, while the neighbouring village lies at 792 m, thus

<sup>2</sup> The process of identifying ethnic identity starting from the evidence offered by archaeology, namely the funerary rituals and the specificity of the material culture, is problematic. Firstly, the terminology is modern and the universal validity of these terms can be questioned. Furthermore, if the issue of ethnic identity is called a 'hot potato' by some sociologists (who have the possibility of observing the expression of this horizontal identity in real life) (MALEŠEVIĆ 2004, 1), the analysis of the issue is obviously even more problematic when dealing with traditional societies. The possibilities of identifying an ethnic group as an echo of macro-group identities from the distant past are limited. Moreover, if we consider one of the main aspects of our interest, namely the connection between these ethnic groups and the archaeological sources, our scientific endeavour becomes even more biased.

<sup>3</sup> This is illustrated by Radu Harhoiu's paper, which already in its title suggests the end phase and eventual disappearance of the culture: *All das weist, wie der Schatzfund von Valea-Strâmbă demonstriert, auf das Ende der S-M-Č-K im letzten Viertel des 4. Jhs. Hin*. HARHOIU 1999, 61. It is furthermore important to cite István Bóna's thoughts on the matter: 'A Gyergyó-Tekerőpatak-Kápolnaoldal ezüst ékszerkincsében (amelyről fentebb már szó esett) „becsomagolva” 40 db ezüstpénz és egy verdefényes Gratianus (367–383) aranysolidus is volt, e legkésőbbi pénz ismét megfelel az összeomlás időpontjának. Együttal ragyogó ante quem keltező jelentősége van a kincsben talált – a vizigót társadalom kapcsán már méltatott – ékszer típusok korára nézve.' ('The silver hoard from Valea-Strâmbă comprises a number of 40 silver coins and one uncirculated gold solidus from Gratian (367–383) which corresponds to the date of the culture's collapse. The gold solidus is also a perfect ante quem with regard to the personal ornament types present in the hoard'). BÓNA 1988, 129. The paper published by Zsolt Körösfői reflects a similar contention: 'Nem kérdéses, hogy a kincsleletek elrejtése a gótoknak és szövetségeseiknek a hunoktól elszenvedett vereségének régészeti bizonyítékai' ('It is undisputable that the hiding of these hoards are in fact archaeological manifestations of the defeat suffered by the Goths and their allies at the hand of the Huns'). KÖRÖSFŐI 2015, 307.

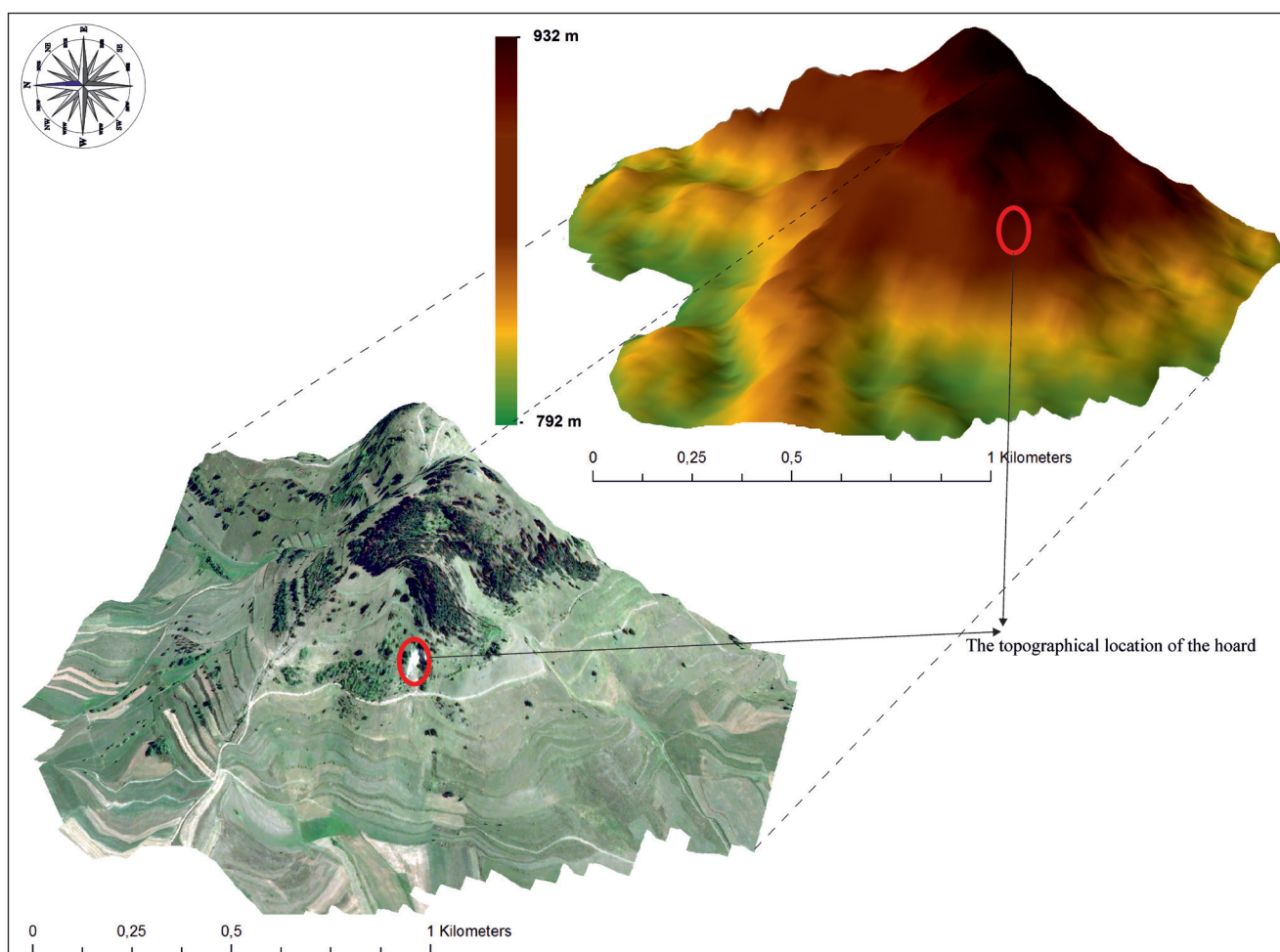
<sup>4</sup> The 40 silver *denarii* from Hadrian (117–138), Antoninus Pius (138–161), Lucius Verus (161–169) and Commodus (180–192) clearly outweigh the 10 late-Roman silver coins from Constans and the 3 gold *aureii* issued by Gratian (367–383).

<sup>5</sup> GÁLL 2005, 145–159.

<sup>6</sup> The name of the hill '*Kápolnaoldal*' or '*Kápolna-oldal*' derives from the chapel built on its summit in the 17<sup>th</sup> century by the Gáborfi family from Gheorgheni (Hu: Gyergyószentmiklós; Ger: Niklasmarkt). Presently it is known as '*Rozália Kápolna*', as it is featured on the military surveys as well.



accounting for a difference of 140 m between the village situated on the highest region of the basin<sup>7</sup> and the highest point of the volcanic cone.



**Fig. 1.** Valea-Strâmbă-Kápolnaoldal illustrated in 3D model.

The hoard itself – according to Székely’s reliable account – was discovered in the area of the hill from where the locals were quarrying limestone and sand already at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, accounting for its current name ‘*Kőbánya*’, i.e. ‘Stone quarry’. In the intervening years two more quarries were opened on the hill, however the point known as *Kőbánya* is found on the western–south-western side of the hill, facing the highway between Miercurea Ciuc (Hu: Csíkszereda) and Gheorgheni (Hu: Gyergyószentmiklós) running at 785 m above sea level.

The point itself is found on the western side of the hill at an inclination of 23 degrees, and an altitude of 857–875 m above sea level. The total area of the stone quarry is approximately 696 m<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore, the fact that sand can be extracted only from the lower parts of the point, means that the discovery spot can be additionally adjusted. What does this localization imply exactly? A complete overview of the Giurgeu basin towards the north, the south, and the west is possible not only from the top of the volcanic cone, but also from *Kőbánya*. It is self-evident that the volcanic cone is unsuitable for human habitation, because of its high altitude and lack of water. Based on both the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Habsburg military surveys from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, the nearest stream, *Tekerőpataka*<sup>8</sup> can be found at a distance of 1200 m. Notwithstanding the 140 m difference in altitude, the drilling of wells can be ruled out considering that wells in the village are 20–25 m deep. Therefore we consider that the place chosen for the hiding of the hoard does not indicate the option for optimal human habitation, but rather a different set of reasons.

<sup>7</sup> The villages to the west of Valea Strâmbă are situated at a considerably lower altitude.

<sup>8</sup> <http://mapire.eu/hu/map/secondsurvey/?bbox=2842702.6365542402%2C5884944.135446933%2C2861047.523342683%2C5893524.191871944>.



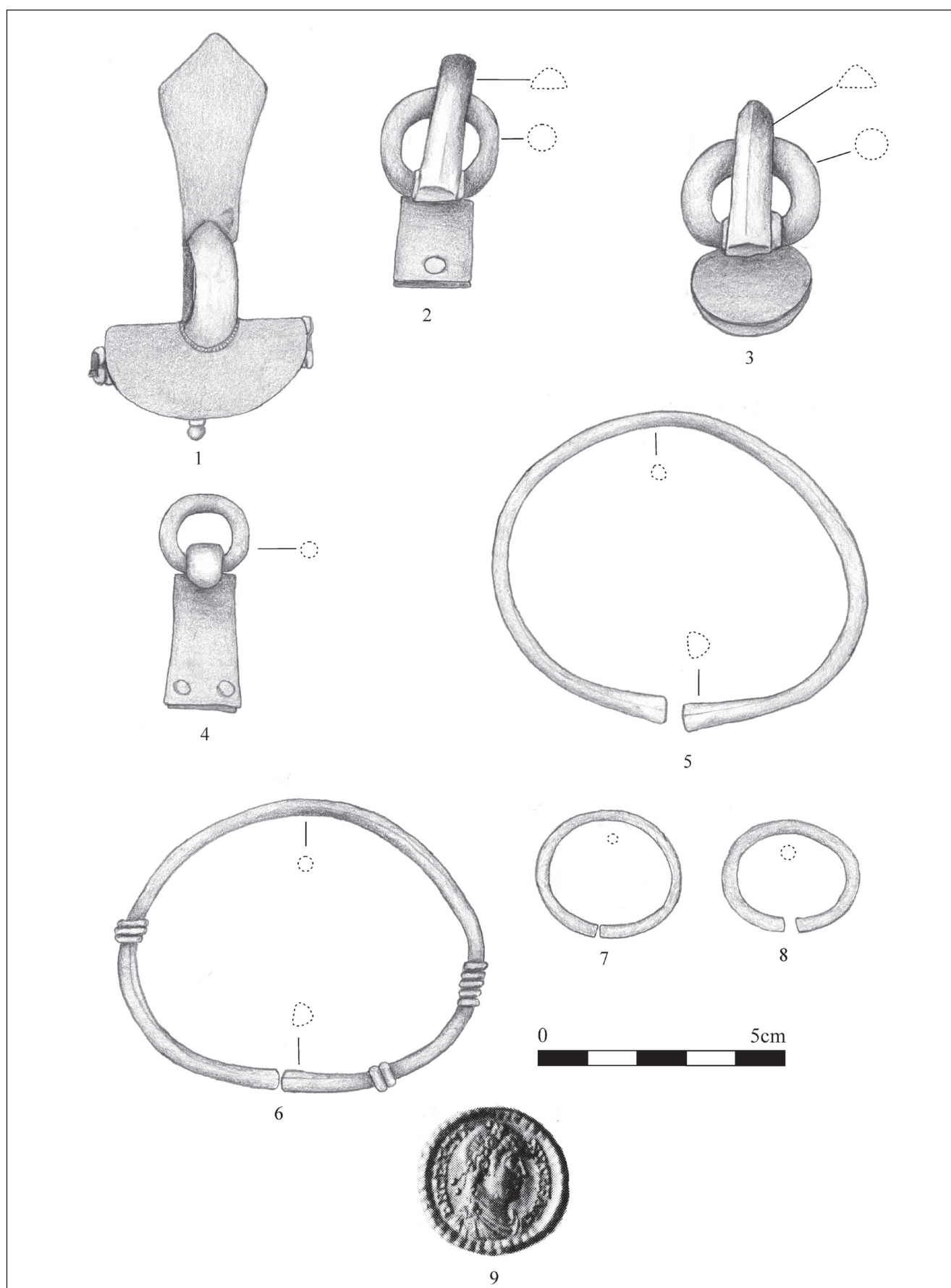
**Fig. 2.** The topographical location of the hoard from Valea-Strâmbă as seen south-west (A) (Photograph: dr. István Fodor) and north-west (B) direction (Photograph: Attila Molnár).

### 3. The international character of hoard's components and their chronological aspects

The nature of the find is given by its components, beside coins, it consists of female personal ornaments.<sup>9</sup> Without the detailed analysis of its composition, the precise chronological framing of the artefacts, the disentanglement of the circumstances of its discovery, and without knowledge of the archaeological context, any assessment regarding the find calls for a high degree of caution and critical appraisal. Furthermore the troublesome afterlife of the find has thwarted any effort aimed the reassessment of the hoard.

<sup>9</sup> GÁLL 2005, 145.





**Fig. 3.** The drawings of the pieces of the hoard (redrawn after SZÉKELY 1945, I. tábla; BÓNA 1988, 24. kép 2).

The hoard comprises so-called Kokowski C1<sup>10</sup> type brooch (Fig. 3/1), also known as Şovan 4b type<sup>11</sup> with semicircular headplate based on the analogies from the cemeteries in Mihălăşeni and Bârlad-Valea-Seacă<sup>12</sup> where they were found in pairs in the shoulder area of the skeletons.<sup>13</sup> With this in mind further doubts with regard to the integrity of the hoard need to be put forward.<sup>14</sup> The respective brooch type is characteristic to the burials belonging to the 3<sup>rd</sup> phase of the Mihălăşeni,<sup>15</sup> dated by the author to the latter half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century and the transition between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>16</sup> This dating is also corroborated by the Straume type VII. B beaker<sup>17</sup> from grave M369 in the Mihălăşeni necropolis, as well as by the Straume type IV beaker<sup>18</sup> from grave M541<sup>19</sup> in the Bârlad-Valea-Seacă necropolis. The aforementioned beaker type is dated in Central-Eastern Europe to the C3-D1 period,<sup>20</sup> in similar fashion with the upper chronological boundary attributed to the Kokowski type C1 brooches.<sup>21</sup>

A later dating is also indicated by the two bent silver wire bracelets with widening terminals (Fig. 3/5–6). These were hitherto singled out as atypical finds within the Sântana de Mureş-Cerneahov cemeteries,<sup>22</sup> their presence indicating 5<sup>th</sup> century Germanic female clothing.<sup>23</sup> Its bronze version has one single occurrence in grave no. 33 from the Sântana de Mureş necropolis,<sup>24</sup> but is entirely absent from the cemeteries Mihălăşeni<sup>25</sup> and Bârlad-Valea-Seacă.<sup>26</sup> The variants with wider terminals are known from grave no. 7 of the Biharkeresztes-Kisfarkasdomb necropolis. These were directly linked by Károly Mesterházy to the finds from Valea Strâmbă, the author emphasizing their wide occurrence in the Hun period as well as their disappearance in the 6<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>27</sup> Further analogies from the Hungarian Great Plain are represented by the two silver bracelets<sup>28</sup> from grave no. 182 of the Sarmatian necropolis at Apátfalva-Nagyút-dűlő site no. 43, dated between the mid-4<sup>th</sup> century and the first third of the 5<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>29</sup> Two close analogies dated to the mid- and late-5<sup>th</sup> century, are known from the Ernei (Hu: Nagyernye)-Köles-kert necropolis.<sup>30</sup> The dating of the finds from Valea Strâmbă falls in a similarly wide chronological framework covering roughly the period between the late-4<sup>th</sup> century and first third of the 5<sup>th</sup> century.

In the case of the silver rings, both their functional interpretation as finger rings (Fig. 3/7–8),<sup>31</sup> and as lock rings has been put forward,<sup>32</sup> thus emphasizing the difficulties in settling the question. Based on the rings from the Sarmatian female grave in Madaras-Halmok, which were found around the neck of the deceased, the finds may have been used for fastening a necklace, possibly together with other personal ornaments.<sup>33</sup> It is interesting to note that in the case of the breast chain found in the 1<sup>st</sup> hoard from Şimleu Silvaniei (Hu: Szilágysomlyó), the pendants were supported by somewhat similar rings,<sup>34</sup> although of different material and technique. A comparable function can be hypothetically assumed in our case, further corroborated by the pendants within the hoard.

<sup>10</sup> KOKOWSKI 1996, 155–156. For a detailed analysis of the issue regarding the brooches with semicircular headplates from the Carpathian Basin and the regions in the east and south vicinity of the Carpathian arch, see: LĂZĂRESCU 2015, 132–141.

<sup>11</sup> ŞOVAN 2005, 152–153.

<sup>12</sup> It is noteworthy that the burials containing this type of brooch differ from the other graves of the necropolis with regard to the quantity and the components of the grave goods, reflecting thus a higher degree of social representation. From a functional perspective, both drinking and serving vessels can be found, occasionally represented by certain types which bear chronological relevancy.

<sup>13</sup> ŞOVAN 2005, Pl. 40–41, Pl. 189–190, Pl. 203–204, Pl. 273–274; PALADE 2004, 547–548, 669–670, Fig. 201, Fig. 292.

<sup>14</sup> SZÉKELY 1945, 95. It is not our intention to cast doubt on the integrity of the hoard's finder, but merely to emphasize the fact that the find was not recovered as a result of controlled archaeological procedures and this fact should have a heavy bearing on its interpretation. Naturally the possibility of contingency with regard to the association between the respective personal ornaments is admitted.

<sup>15</sup> ŞOVAN 1999, 21; ŞOVAN 2005, 186.

<sup>16</sup> ŞOVAN 2005, 188.

<sup>17</sup> ŞOVAN 2005, Pl. 206/25.

<sup>18</sup> PALADE 2004, 669, Fig. 292/1.

<sup>19</sup> With regard to the respective burials, V. Palade has mentioned earlier the possibility that some of the graves can be dated to the 5<sup>th</sup> century (PALADE 1983, 405–406).

<sup>20</sup> PÁNCZÉL/DOBOS 2007, 70.

<sup>21</sup> KOKOWSKI 1996, 159; LĂZĂRESCU 2015, 138.

<sup>22</sup> GÁLL 2005, 148.

<sup>23</sup> RÁCZ 2016, 322.

<sup>24</sup> KOVÁCS 1912, 286. 44. Kép 2.

<sup>25</sup> ŞOVAN 2005.

<sup>26</sup> PALADE 2004.

<sup>27</sup> MESTERHÁZY 2007, 282.

<sup>28</sup> KUJÁNI 2015, 131. 19. Tábl. 3, 4.

<sup>29</sup> KUJÁNI 2014, 115.

<sup>30</sup> BERECKZI *et alii* 2015, 166. The processing of the finds is still in progress.

<sup>31</sup> SZÉKELY 1945, 95.

<sup>32</sup> GÁLL 2005, 148.

<sup>33</sup> KÓHEGYI/VÖRÖS 2011, 303.

<sup>34</sup> SCHMAUDER 2002, Taf. 154.

Although the pin of the belt buckle is missing according to the illustration published by Zoltán Székely,<sup>35</sup> based on its dimensions given by the aforementioned author, the piece is identical with the one on the photograph published by István Bóna (Fig. 3/3).<sup>36</sup> The first impression is that the silver buckle with a slightly widening frame and oval neck-plate belongs to the type known as *Šovan 2d*<sup>37</sup> known from the graves belonging to the 3<sup>rd</sup> phase of the Mihălășeni necropolis.<sup>38</sup> Its variant made from bronze with silver rivets is also known from grave no. 36 of the Sântana de Mureș necropolis,<sup>39</sup> while a piece with oval buckle-frame and three rivets was discovered in grave no. 19 from Tiszadob-Sziget.<sup>40</sup> This type of buckles are widespread in southern Central Europe and the Lower Danube during the late-4<sup>th</sup> century and throughout the 5<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>41</sup> However it is important to point out that the gilt silver buckle-frame<sup>42</sup> with triangular section form the early-5<sup>th</sup> century grave in Lengyeltóti-Gyógyszertár<sup>43</sup> indicates a later period of use. In Transylvania aside from the two bronze buckles discovered in Fântânele (Hu: Szászújós)<sup>44</sup> and dated to the latter part of the 4<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>45</sup> none of the buckles bearing prongs with triangular section were found in contexts attributed to the 4<sup>th</sup> century. Considering the aforementioned and its less sophisticated technical features, the buckle from Valea Strâmbă can be dated between the late-4<sup>th</sup> and the early-5<sup>th</sup> century.

Furthermore, some interesting connections can be inferred based on the rectangular neck-plate of the buckle (Fig. 3/2). Its analogies are widely known throughout the Carpathian Basin, e.g. from the archaeological feature interpreted as a ritual pit (G27) from Ernei-*Carieră*,<sup>46</sup> dated by the authors to the D1 horizon<sup>47</sup> of the Central European chronological system, based partially on the reassessment of the hoard from Valea Strâmbă. Similar silver finds but with rectangular buckle-frames and neck-plates displaying tremolo decoration on its margins come from grave no. 2 of the Biharkeresztes-Kisfarkasdomb necropolis,<sup>48</sup> from grave no. 25 of the Tiszadob-Sziget necropolis,<sup>49</sup> as well as from the precinct of the Tápé-Malajdok A.<sup>50</sup> Based on the known analogies the buckle found in the hoard under scrutiny here falls within a wider chronological timeframe, i.e. between the late-4<sup>th</sup> century and the 1<sup>st</sup> third of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. In this case, the upper limit of this timeframe is determined by the same type buckles found in grave no.1 from the necropolis in Untersiebenbrunn.<sup>51</sup>

The find originally interpreted by Zoltán Székely as a belt end,<sup>52</sup> and described by later commentators as a buckle<sup>53</sup> is quite probably a strap distributor (Fig. 3/4) as indicated by its very close analogy from Coșovenii de Jos,<sup>54</sup> dated to the late-4<sup>th</sup>–early-5<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>55</sup> Based on the assessment of Radu Harhoiu,<sup>56</sup> the aforementioned dating can be inferred with regard to the find from Valea Strâmbă.

With regard to the three *lunulae* from the hoard,<sup>57</sup> no straightforward conclusions can be drawn in the absence of reliable illustration, however it can be noted that both 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> century analogies are known for these pieces coming from a wide geographical area including the Carpathian Basin,<sup>58</sup> Eastern Europe,<sup>59</sup> and the Caucasian region.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>35</sup> The illustration published by Székely has been widely adopted by the archaeological literature. See: HARHOIU 1997, Taf. CxXXIX/69; SCHMAUDER 2002, 28, Abb. 2; GÁLL 2005, 2. tábla 2a.–b; KAZANSKI 2009, 305, Fig. 27/6; HARHOIU/SPÂNU/GÁLL 2011, Fig. 14/46.

<sup>36</sup> BÓNA 1988, 146. 24/1.

<sup>37</sup> ŠOVAN 2005, 154.

<sup>38</sup> ŠOVAN 2005, 186.

<sup>39</sup> KOVÁCS 1912, 286. 45. Kép 5a–b.

<sup>40</sup> ISTVÁNOVITS 1993, 104, Abb. 10/1.

<sup>41</sup> KHRAPUNOV/KAZANSKI 2016, 373.

<sup>42</sup> BAKAY 1978, 152. Abb. 3/1; BÓNA 1993, XXII; SCHMAUDER 2002, Taf. 68/2.

<sup>43</sup> SCHMAUDER 2002, 47.

<sup>44</sup> MARINESCU/GAIU 1989, 127, 129, Abb. 2. 4/a–b; 3/3.

<sup>45</sup> MARINESCU/GAIU 1989, 143.

<sup>46</sup> CRIȘAN/LĂZĂRESCU 2010, 255, Pl. 12/2.

<sup>47</sup> CRIȘAN/LĂZĂRESCU 2010, 232–233.

<sup>48</sup> MESTERHÁZY 2007, 271. Abb. 3/3.

<sup>49</sup> ISTVÁNOVITS 1993, 106. Abb. 12/2.

<sup>50</sup> PÁRDUCZ/KOREK 1948, LXV tábla. 10; ISTVÁNOVITS/KULCSÁR 1999, 90, Fig 19/2.

<sup>51</sup> SCHMAUDER 2002, Taf. 221/38/3–5.

<sup>52</sup> SZÉKELY 1945, 97.

<sup>53</sup> GÁLL 2005, 149.

<sup>54</sup> HARHOIU 1997, Taf. XXXVIII/5, 9.

<sup>55</sup> HARHOIU 1997, 52.

<sup>56</sup> HARHOIU 1997, Taf. CxXXVIII/6–7, 41.

<sup>57</sup> SZÉKELY 1945, 1. Kép.

<sup>58</sup> RÁCZ 2016, 342, 345.

<sup>59</sup> PAMYATNIKI 2007, Ris. 121/4; 138/17.

<sup>60</sup> MASTYKOVA 2009, Tab. 143/13; 173/3–4; GABUEV 2014, Ris. 22/2–3; 57; 66/6.

In the case of the latest coins, only partial information could be recovered. The Museum purchased only one of the three gold coins – an *aureus* issued by Gratian – of which only a photograph of the obverse has survived. The lack of a photographic record illustrating the reverse of the coin would have thwarted the precise dating of the find in the interval 367–383, i.e. between the ascent to the throne and the death of Gratian. The original interpretation and description by Zoltán Székely,<sup>61</sup> given below offers however some essential data in this regard:

‘7. Gratianus, (367–383 n. Chr.) Coh. 38. Aureus.

Avers: D N GRATIA-NUS P F AUG. Die bemäntelte Büste des Kaisers schaut nach rechts, der Kopf mit einem Diadem geziert.

Revers: Die sitzenden Gestalten der beiden Kaiser halten gegeneinander zu gewendet gemeinsam eine Erdkugel, im Hintergrund die Göttin des Sieges. VICTOR-IA AUGG. TROBC.’

From the description we learn that the coin is an *aureus* of the *Victoria Augg* type issued at Augusta Treverorum. This type of reverse with the two emperors depicted each on a throne holding a globe was issued subsequent to the investiture of Gratian as *Augustus*, but in association with the obverse variant displaying a smaller effigy and uninterrupted legend. The piece from Valea Strâmbă with its obverse depicting the effigy of the emperor wearing a rosette diadem of gems and pearls and interrupted legend A – N possibly dates from the year 373 or more likely from the period following the death of Valentinian I (November 375) when Gratian became co-emperor of the western part of the empire together with the child Valentinian II. In the same period, at the scale of the entire empire, Gratian was the co-emperor of Valens until August 378, starting from January 379 Theodosius I ascending to the throne of the eastern empire.

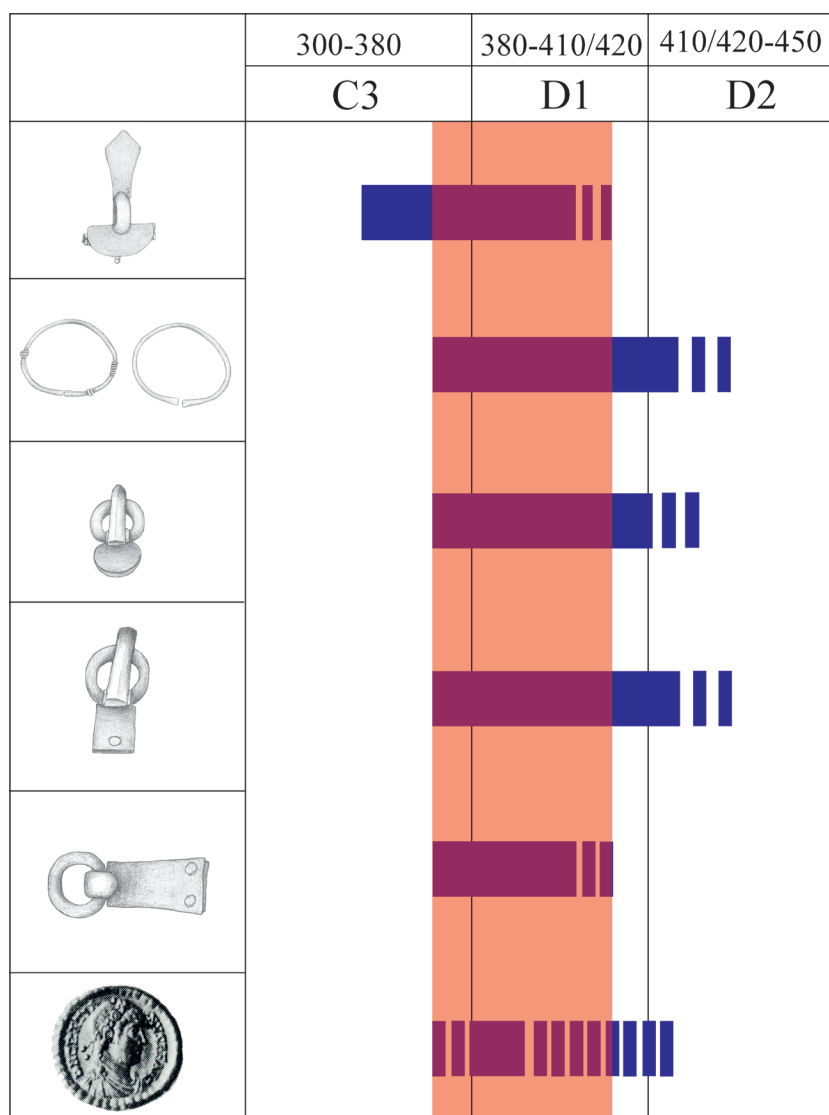


Fig. 4. The chronology of the pieces of the hoard.

<sup>61</sup> SZÉKELY 1945, 101.

The coin described by Zoltán Székely can be dated according to RIC IX, p. 21, no. 39 c, period III, between 17 November 375 and 9 August 378 or slightly earlier according to Depeyrot 1996 (p. 119, nr. 43/4) i.e. between the end of 374 and April 375.

Székely's reference to Cohen (vol. 8, p. 130–131, no. 38) where the reverse is described as follows: '*Gratien et Valentinien jeune assis de face ...*' raises the question whether the coin could be dated after 378 when both the earlier variant of the *Victoria Augg* type with the two emperors depicted having the same size (Valens and Gratian until 378, Gratian and Theodosius starting from 379) as well as the variant with the character on the right smaller (Gratian and Valentinian II), are known. Considering however that the obverse-type with rosette diadem, as is the case for the piece from Valea Strâmbă, is unknown on coins dated after 378, the reference catalogues for this period containing only examples with diadems from pearl strings, the chronological framework mentioned earlier is more feasible.

It is important to point out thus that the exact dating of the recovered coin is highly problematic. The situation is evidently even less clear in the case of the further two *solidi* coins which have been lost in the intervening years, the only available information being that these were 'new', possibly uncirculated coins issued by emperor Gratian. This information however refers only to the period in which the coin was released to which we have to add the time take for it to reach the Giurgeu basin – as well as its cause and means – and the time leading up to its hoarding. All these unknown parameters lend a high degree of uncertainty to any attempts of a precise dating.

## Careful conclusions

1. The preservation of the hoard is only partial, thus considering that its exact composition is unknown, the chronological framework of the individual pieces should not be extrapolated to the hoard itself. With this in mind the hoard is unfit to sustain any kind of historical argument and hypothesis. With regard to the 'catastrophe scenario',<sup>62</sup> according to which the treasure was hidden by fleeing Goths in the wake of the Hun's attack it is important to point out that this narrative can be regarded as a result of mixed argumentation ('*gemischte Argumentation*') as its authors were not familiar with the geographical specificities of the region, and reached their conclusions by amplifying the historical sources and the archaeological finds.

2. The investigations into the research history of the find revealed that the dating of the hoard was inexplicably adjusted to the find presenting the earliest dating possibilities, i.e. the brooch which under certain circumstances can also be dated to a period preceding the rest of the artefacts from the assemblage. The discussion of this issue was centred on the need to integrate the rest of the artefacts into the chronological analysis of the hoard. The respective finds clearly indicate the period between the late-4<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century.

3. The dating of the assemblage therefore should take into account the aspects underlined above (first paragraph).

4. Taking into consideration the hoard finds with precise place of discovery it becomes evident that in virtually all cases the locations chosen for concealment are conspicuous from a topographic point of view, standing out of their environment. Indeed these points are well visible within a micro-regional context from a considerable distance, in the present case the *Kápolnaoldal* can be seen from more than 20 km. As mentioned above, considering that the respective point is unsuitable for human habitation, the interpretation of the find as the result of a ritual practice cannot be ruled out entirely.

This phenomenon was observed in the case of the well-known treasure hoards from Pietroasele-Via Ardelenilor,<sup>63</sup> Șimleu Silvaniei I–II,<sup>64</sup> and Suluca.<sup>65</sup> Unfortunately there is no data available with regard to the discovery place of the hoard from Botoșani,<sup>66</sup> nor the possible hoard or funerary find from Coșovenii de Jos.<sup>67</sup> In the case of further two hoards clearly dated to the 5<sup>th</sup> century, Sudzha and Volnikovka – situated at nearly 1000 km from Valea Strâmbă in the forest steppe of Russia – similar topographical features as the ones outlined above could be noticed.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>62</sup> See note no. 3.

<sup>63</sup> ODOBESCU 1899–1900; HARHOIU 1997, 184–185.

<sup>64</sup> See first of all the localization made by Radu Harhoiu (HARHOIU 2013, Abb. 6).

<sup>65</sup> Daniel Spănu personal comments.

<sup>66</sup> HARHOIU 1997, 165.

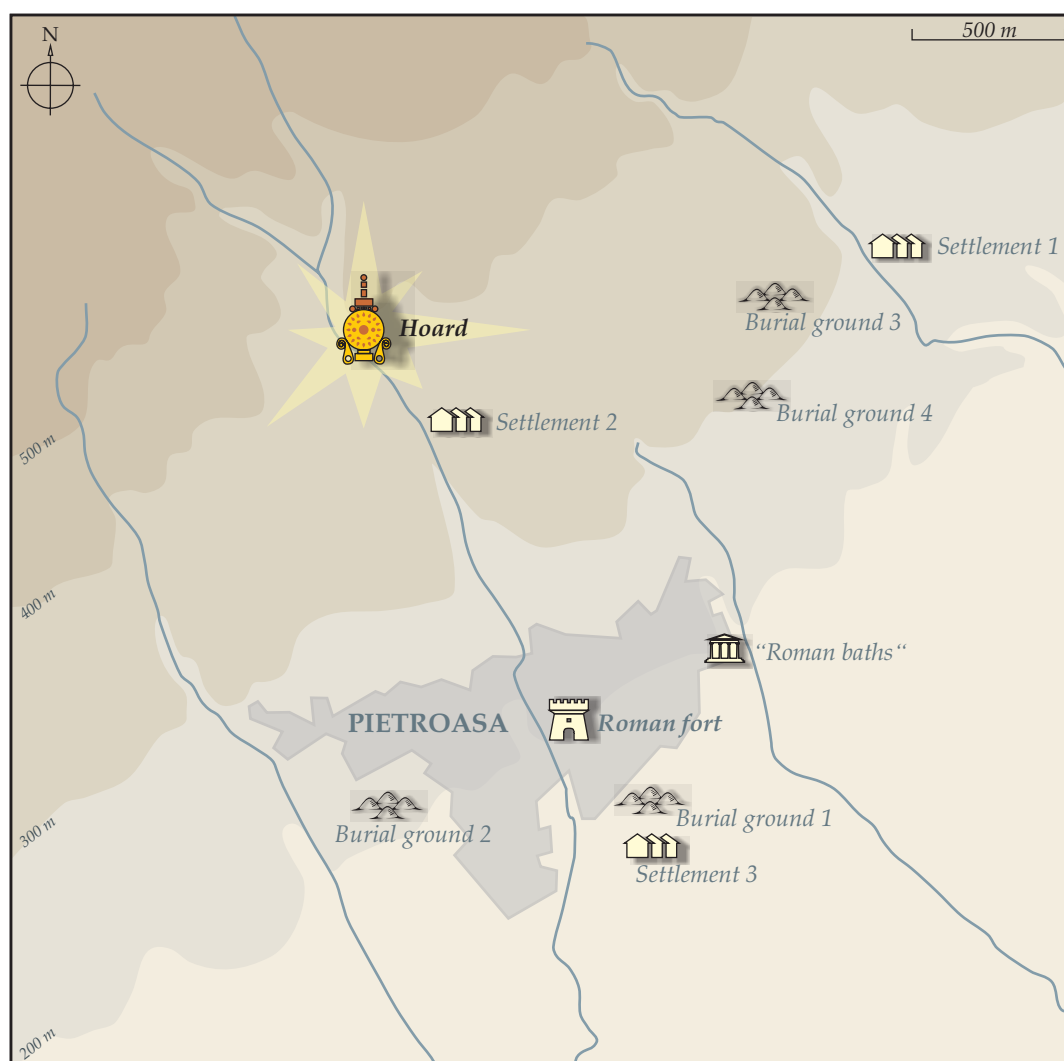
<sup>67</sup> HARHOIU 1997, 173.

<sup>68</sup> VOLNIKOVSKIJ «KLAD» 2014, 4: Fig; 9/fig.



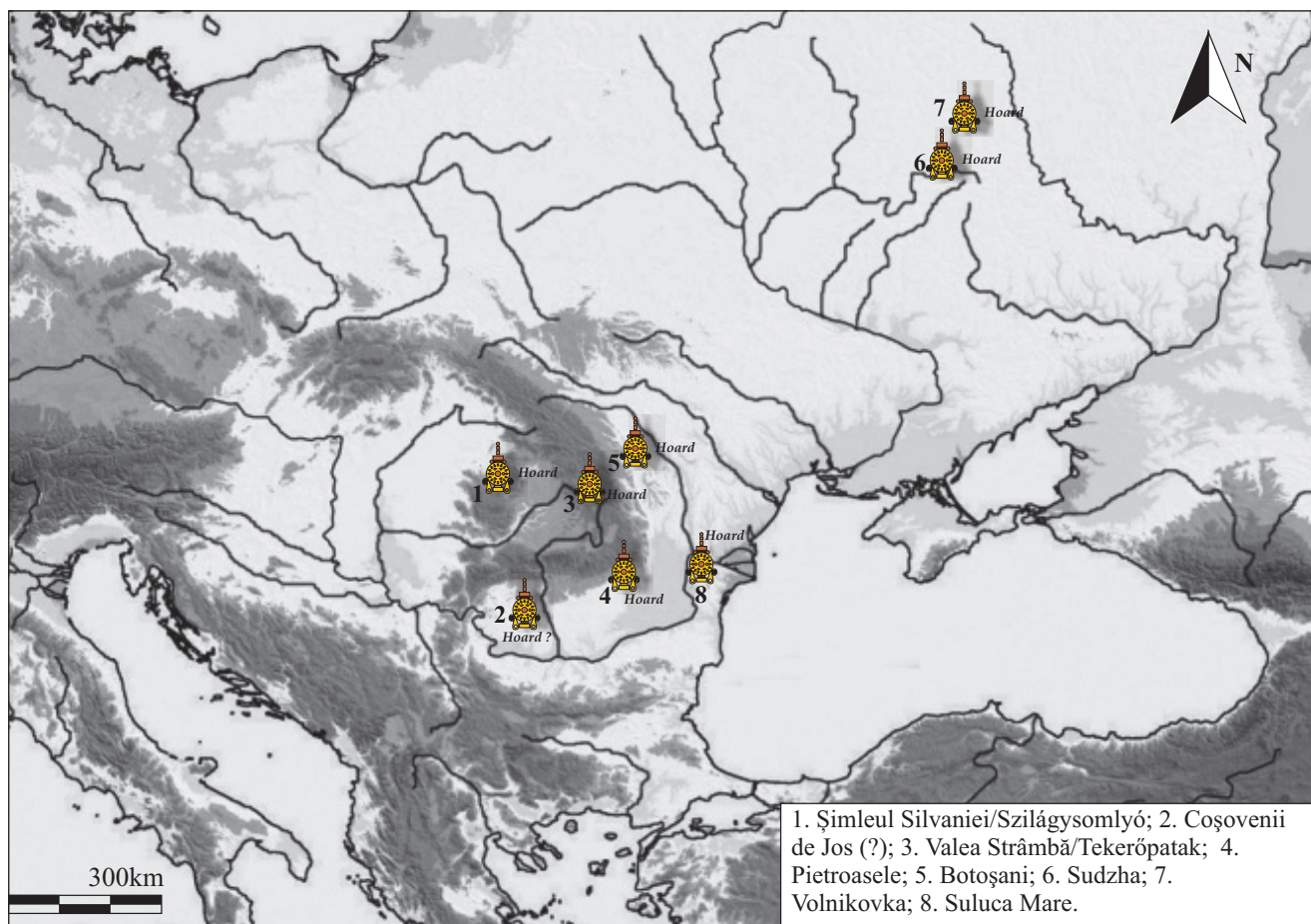


**Fig. 5.** Outlook from the *Kápolnaoldal* westward (Photograph: Attila Molnár).



**Fig. 6.** The topographical location of the Pietroasele's hoard and the neighbouring archaeological sites from the 4–5<sup>th</sup> centuries (after HARHOIU/SPÂNU/GÁLL 2011, Fig. 23/1).





**Fig. 7.** The geographical spreading of the hoards mentioned in the article.

The seven cases mentioned above indicate that concerning the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> century hoards we are not simply dealing with a phenomenon of teaurization, but a cultural manifestation of the late antique power elites spread throughout a considerable geographical area. It is nonetheless not our intention to suggest any direct affinities or common identities across such vast spaces, but the existence of certain cultural networks linked to the late antique elites in Eastern Europe and the Carpathian Basin which on occasion can be observed from an archaeological perspective. The fact that the Eastern European and Russian hoards can be connected to the Hun elite constitutes further proof for the deep system of relations set up between the Huns, the Asian power structures,<sup>69</sup> the elites of the steppe, and the Germanic peoples of Europe.<sup>70</sup>

Translated by **Dávid Petruț**

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<sup>69</sup> In Walter Pohl's terminology these power structures led by Asian elites are referred to as 'steppe states'. POHL 2003, 272–273.

<sup>70</sup> RÁCZ 2016, 301–359.

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